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S E C R E T ANKARA 004230

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/04/2013

TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY DEMANDS IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF ITS SPECIAL FORCES PERSONNEL IN NORTHERN IRAQ

(U) Classified by DCM Robert Deutsch, reasons 1.5, b/d.

[1](#)1. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

[1](#)2. (C) Acting Undersecretary of MFA Baki Ilkin convoked DCM the evening of July 4th to formally protest the reported arrest by US forces of Turkish Special Forces (SF) in Sulaimaniyah, Iraq. According to Ilkin, at approximately 14:30 July 4, Turkish SF reported that 150 US troops arrived at the Turkish SF Headquarters in Sulaimaniyah to search the facility. From that point communications from the Turkish SF to their superiors were blocked. An eyewitness outside the facility apparently informed the SF that the building was searched, indeed ransacked, that a Turkish flag in the SF unit commander's office was torn down, and that the 13 Turkish SF were taken away in shackles. Shortly thereafter, the Iraqi Turkomen Front office in Sulaimaniyah was also visited by US soldiers and the Turkomen were arrested. They were taken away hooded, shackled, and handcuffed. Communication with the outside eyewitness was broken at that point as well. In addition, the Turkomen radio station in Sulaimaniyah was taken off the air.

[1](#)3. (C) Ilkin reported that both groups had been taken to a prison in Kirkuk. He added that there were unconfirmed reports of further moves against Turkish SF in Iraq and expressed the hope that these reports were not true. Ilkin said the way that the Turks had been treated was deplorable, equivalent to the treatment of Saddam's Fedayeen, and certainly not a way to treat an Ally. He said that the Turks didn't know who decided to take such an action and, while they didn't know whether the fact was relevant, they understood that Col Mayville of the 101st Airborne Division, with whom they have experienced previous difficulties, was in Sulaimaniyah on July 4. Ilkin noted that the GOT had previously complained about the attitude and actions of Col Mayville. The GOT suspects that such an action could have been taken on July 4 because communications with authorities and between Ankara and Washington would have been hampered by the holiday. Ilkin noted intercepts of communications in the Kirkuk-Sulaimaniyah area with individuals stating that "Kirkuk has been liberated today." (Comment: with the implication that this confirmed an anti-Turkish intent.)

[1](#)4. (C) Ilkin said that this action was already leaking to the press (we have not been able to confirm) and that President Sezer and PM Erdogan had been informed. If the questions were not immediately dealt with, this incident would have significant negative repercussions on the US-Turkish relationship that both sides had been working to put back on firmer ground. He said the Turkish Government requests swift action to resolve the incident including:

- immediate release of those detained
- a full investigation of the incident
- identification of those responsible for the decision and appropriate action
- share of the results of the investigation with the GOT.

[1](#)5. (C) Comment: Embassy learned of this alleged incident mid afternoon July 4 from TGS and MFA sources. Through military and civilian channels (EUCOM, CENTCOM, State, OCPA Baghdad) we tried to confirm any relevant activity. It took some 6-7 hours before we were able to confirm the incident, and Ambassador Pearson informed U/S Ilkin (just prior to the convocation) that we had taken 23 presumed civilians, since they neither ID cards nor uniforms, in custody.

[1](#)6. (C) Action Requested: Given the potential serious consequences to our relationship, we need to resolve this incident as quickly as humanly possible. We request a response with as much specificity as possible for the GOT by OOB Ankara time July 5. We need to tell the Turks very quickly, in the most concrete, convincing terms possible, why we have taken this step. We should provide the briefing in whatever channels would be most appropriate given the sensitivity and classification of the information.

PEARSON